R E P O R T R E S U M E S

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A COMPARISON OF THE RESPONSES OF TWO GROUPS OF SEVENTH GRADE PUPILS TO THE SAME READING SELECTIONS.

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DESCRIPTORS- *DISADVANTAGED YOUTH, *READING SKILLS, *READING ABILITY, CRITICAL READING, *GRADE 7, CULTURALLY DISADVANTAGED, *ORAL READING, UNIVERSITY OF CINCINNATI, DEPARTMENT OF INSTRUCTION, CINCINNATI PUBLIC SCHOOLS,

THE REACTIONS OF SEVENTH-GRADE STUDENTS FROM DIFFERENT SOCIOECONOMIC BACKGROUNDS TO THE SAME READINGS WERE STUDIED. THE READING REACTION ANALYSIS WAS GIVEN TO 73 SEVENTH-GRADE STUDENTS FROM PUBLIC SCHOOLS IN ADVANTAGED AREAS AND TO 59 SEVENTH-GRADE STUDENTS FROM PUBLIC SCHOOLS IN DISADVANTAGED AREAS OF CINCINNATI, OHIO. RESPONSES TO THIS TEST AND THE TAPED RESPONES OF A SAMPLE FROM EACH OF THE FIVE CLASSES TO AN INTERVIEW QUESTION WERE SCORED ON A 5-POINT SCALE. RESULTS INDICATE THAT ALTHOUGH THE ADVANTAGED GROUP GENERALLY DID BETTER THAN THE DISADVANTAGED GROUP, THE DISADVANTAGED GROUP SEEMED TO BE MORE VERSATILE, ORIGINAL, AND VIVID IN THEIR ORAL INTERPRETATIONS OF THE MATERIALS READ. FURTHER ANALYSIS SHOWED THAT ITEMS MISSED BY A LARGE NUMBER OF ADVANTAGED STUDENTS WERE MISSED BY AN EQUALLY LARGE NUMBER OF DISADVANTAGED STUDENTS. THESE FINDINGS IMPLY THAT THE READING OF BOTH TYPES OF LEARNERS DID NOT DIFFER MUCH AND THAT BOTH GROUPS NEED GUIDANCE IN DEVELOPING THE ABILITY TO READ BEYOND WHAT IS STATED IN A SELECTION. IT IS IMPLIED THAT SOME LEARNING ASSETS COULD BE PRESENT AMONG DISADVANTAGED LEARNERS. THIS ARTICLE IS PUBLISHED IN "JOURNAL OF INSTRUCTIONAL RESEARCH AND PROGRAM DEVELOPMENT--LOCAL READING AND MATH RESEARCH," VOLUME 2, NUMBER 4, MAY 1967 OF THE DEPARTMENT OF INSTRUCTION, CINCINNATI PUBLIC SCHOOLS. (NS)

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PREFACE

The title of this journal specifies two related operations that are essential to maintaining quality in education. Determining the effectiveness of various approaches to teaching demands continuous instructional research. Although such research has traditionally been done by the staffs of universities, often in restricted settings or with a select population, one can scarcely debate the desirability of action research that involves teachers who are at the core of the educational process.

Growing out of continuous research is the process of program development. In this era of increasingly rapid changes in our technological culture, it is vital to make optimal use of new instructional techniques and media. The development of any new program begins with an idea--an idea that must be refined, tested and refined again until its effectiveness has been established.

To stimulate this kind of research and development in the public schools in Cincinnati is the primary goal toward which this journal is directed. The publication attempts to do this in two ways: 1. by reporting research findings that have relevance for the professional educator and 2. by encouraging action research toward evaluating instructional procedures.

Instructional research has received considerable spur from the Elementary and Secondary Education Act. Because of the evaluation required by this law, public school systems throughout the country have been forced to take a more thorough look at their methods of operation than they have previously had the incentive or means to do. Certainly the Cincinnati schools have engaged wholeheartedly in this kind of appraisal. The first three issues of this volume of the journal report the program and project evaluation of the first months of Education Act services in Cincinnati.

But our efforts in evaluation must not be confined to the effects of this important piece of federal legislation. Instructional research must be an ongoing and pervasive process. This issue presents reports of some of the instructional research carried on in Cincinnati apart from the Education Act evaluation. Included are seven articles, focusing principally upon reading and mathematics instruction. Two of these have not been released in any form, while the other five have received limited circulation as separate papers. Even though some of the studies go back a few years, all seem to have relevance for a large number of staff members in the Cincinnati schools and for educators in other parts of the country as well.

It is hoped that personnel to whom copies of this journal are sent will share these reports with teachers who might benefit. In this way, we hope not only to improve the development of instructional programs, but also to stimulate careful research that will insure the quality of education given to the pupils of our schools.

James N. Jacobs
Editor

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A Comparison of the Responses of Two Groups of Seventh Grade Pupils to the Same Reading Selections

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Continuing concern has been expressed for the child whose home and community environments offer a limited stimulus for reading, and whose handicaps in reading development persist over a period of years. Particular interest has been shown in younger "culturally deprived" children, for whom Head Start and compensatory education programs have been established to alleviate restricted language experiences. Little evidence appears to exist, however, respecting the nature of the reading handicap of older pupils that results from cultural differences.

While the presence of crippling inadequacies in reading skill among children who are culturally deprived is almost universally acknowledged, the question may be asked: Are there not some "plus factors" as far as reading is concerned, which serve to help these children? For example, Wilkerson[1] concluded that some learning assets may be present among disadvantaged pupils.

> It is occasionally suggested that disadvantaged children are also characterized by certain distinctive learning assets, such as complex symbolization and creativity, and accuracy of perception and generalization around some social, psychological and physical phenonema. Here, too, however even more than in the case of their handicaps--systematic documentation is still to be made.

In general, reading of the literature augments personal experience with these children in making the following generalizations about the reading of the culturally disadvantaged child.

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[1] Doxey A. Wilkerson, "Prevailing and Needed Emphasis in Research on the Education of Disadvantaged Children and Youth" Journal of Negro Education, p. 350. XXXIII Summer, 1964.

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the low status youngster because he appears not to have achieved a level of verbal competence necessary for the achievement of such tasks. These conclusions also serve to cast some doubt upon the validity of intelligence scores based upon the tests used[3] for a group of 11 and 12-year olds, and give evidence of the verbal handicaps of low-status children of upper elementary school age.

John[4] gave language tasks to three groups of Negro children from lower-lower class, upper-lower and middle classes. The tasks involved labeling, word association and "concept sorting." The investigator discovered that middle class children surpassed lower class children of the same age in size of vocabulary, in verbal identification, and in "conceptual sorting and verbalization behavior."

Havighurst[5] pointed out that the socially disadvantaged pupil has lacked family stimulation leading to power in language. Such lacks include: "A family conversation which answers his questions and encourages him to ask questions; extends his vocabulary with new words and with adjectives and adverbs; gives him a right and a need to stand up for and to explain his point of view on the world."

Strodbeck[6] has analyzed the source of the slum child's verbal deprivation; ascribing it to the lack of the "hidden curriculum" the middle class child enjoys.

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3 Chicago Tests of Primary Mental Abilities: California Short-Form Test of Mental Maturity; Otis (Beta, Form DM) Quick-Scoring Mental Ability, and the Henmon-Nelson Test of Mental Ability.

4 Vera P. John, "The Intellectual Development of Slum Children; Some Preliminary Findings," American Journal of Orthopsychiatry. 33 (October, 1963), 813-822.

5 Robert J. Havighurst "Educationally Difficult Student: What the Schools Can Do." National Association of Secondary Schools Principals Bulletin. 49 (March, 1965), 110-127.

6 Strodbeck "The Hidden Curriculum," p. 111, in Learning and the Educational Process, J.D. Krumboltz, Ed. Chicago: Rand McNally and Co. 1965.

school he is too far behind to catch up, and is likely to be truant, aggressive, and quite possibly delinquent.[10]

In addition to promoting the careful teaching of essential skills in reading at all levels, the following recommendations relate specifically to the junior high school reader.[11]

> Equip the classroom with good books on suitable levels of difficulty, and on a great variety of subjects.
>
> Provide newspapers and magazines in fourth grade and above.
>
> Provide success stories of persons of the child's background who have risen economically and socially.
>
> Assure the presence of a variety of books in which there is high adventure.

The effects of deprivation are easily observed by a visitor to primary classrooms. The presence of language-deprived pupils in junior high schools presents even more difficult problems, since these pupils may have failed to achieve satisfaction and recognition in the area of language study during their entire school experience.

Selection of Subjects

The subjects are 132 seventh grade pupils from five classes in the public schools of Cincinnati, Ohio, enrolled in sections labeled "general" seventh English. This term as here used denotes pupils who do not rank high in measures of achievement and intelligence, and are not expected to be "college preparatory" in either their motivations or abilities. Neither are they "slow learners." These pupils are "average" rather than inferior or superior in intelligence or achievement for their school groups.

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10 Reading for Children Without--Our Disadvantaged Youth. Chap. 1, p.3. "Special Needs of Children Without" Gertrude Whipple and Mildred H. Black (Comps.) Newark; Delaware: The International Reading Association, 1966.

11 Ibid., p. 7.

Table 1. Distribution by Chronological Age and Sex of 69 Seventh Grade Pupils from a Culturally Deprived Area, and 59 Seventh Grade Pupils from a Culturally Advantaged Area.

Chronological Age in Years and Months	Culturally Deprived			Culturally Advantaged		
	Boys	Girls	Total	Boys	Girls	Total
15-6 - 15-11	1	0	1	0	0	0
15-0 - 15-5	2	0	2	0	0	0
14-6 - 14-11	1	2	3	2	1	3
14-0 - 14-5	2	2	4	1	2	3
13-6 - 13-11	3	1	4	1	4	5
13-0 - 13-5	6	5	11	7	10	17
12-6 - 12-11	10	15	25	10	8	18
12-0 - 12-5	8	3	11	2	6	8
11-6 - 11-11	3	3	6	1	4	5
11-0 - 11-5	1	0	1	0	0	0
TOTAL	38	31	69*	24	35	59

*Data on C.A. were not available for four subjects in this group.

Final selection of material for the trial form of the reading test included a poem "Jan. Jan. the Jeweler Man," by Aileen Fisher;[12] and a folk tale, The Greedy Rich Man.[13] An excerpt from a junior novel, The Real Dream, by Molly Cone,[14] was included in the test selection, but too few pupils completed the reading to include it in the final analysis.

The Dale-Chall formula was used to establish the level of difficulty

[12]Found in The Year Around, p. 162. Alice I. Hazeltine and Elva S. Smith (Comps.). Nashville, Tenn.: The Abingdon Press. Used by permission of the author.

[13]From More Tales of Faraway Folk by Babette Deutsch and Avrahm Yarmolinsky. New York: Harper and Row. Used by permission of Harper and Row, Publishers.

[14]Used with the permission of Houghton Mifflin Company, Publishers.

were applied:

Topic: Awareness of appropriate language
Idea: The pupil should be able to choose among phrases as to which is most or least appropriate in a given context
Sample Item: "A crowd of students went past them on the library steps." A good way to tell how the students went past them is to say that they
a. marched past them
b. swirled past them
c. ran past them
d. floated past them

Topic: Application of the author's idea to another situation
Idea: If the author wanted to illustrate his thought about _____ in another way he could have _____.
Sample Item: Suppose you could see a moving picture of this story. In which scene showing the rich man do you think the audience would be most likely to laugh?
a. when he is talking to the wise man
b. as he tells the laborers not to stop working
c. when he climbs the birch tree
d. as he walks home at the end of the story

Constructing Essay Questions. The "essay" questions were phrased so as to cause the pupil to make applications to a new situation on the basis of generalizations or inferences drawn from the selection. For example, the pupil was asked, "If you picked up some diamonds told about in this poem, how would you think your hands would feel?" Since the diamonds are snow crystals, the minimum answer would be "cold."

It can readily be seen that such a question tests "higher level" comprehension abilities, that is, ability to infer, to make generalizations and to project beyond the present illustration to an illustration from one's own experience, and to the prediction of likely consequences. The rationale behind the decision to use this kind of question rather than questions dependent upon factual details lies in the quest for the possibility that culturally deprived children may be discovered to have some considerable ability to make inferences and generalizations drawn from their reading within the limits of their present reading skill and background of experience.

It is apparent that although the "culturally deprived" group contained six pupils whose scores were lower than those of any pupil in the "advantaged" group, the total range of scores is quite closely parallel. The difference between the two means is 1.03, a difference which is statistically significant at the 5% level. That there should be a significant difference in the means of the two groups is precisely what might be expected. The over-all reading skill of pupils from "disadvantaged backgrounds" is generally observed to be at a lower level.

However, since the purpose of this investigation was not to compare grouped scores alone, but rather the nature of responses, a graphic representation of the percent of errors made by each group for each question, and by types of question may be illuminating. Figure 1 shows graphically the percent of pupils in each group who missed each of the 26 items in the test. Inspection of this graph makes it clear that, with few exceptions, the items that were frequently missed by the "culturally deprived" group were also difficult for the "culturally privileged" and, similarly, that the two groups found most of the same items easy.

Figure 2 shows the same patterns of response of both groups for the eight items in the test which call for making inferences. The results are somewhat surprising since it would be reasonable to assume that making inferences might be an area in which more privileged children might be expected to excel. The figure shows that, although for some items the percent of error is somewhat higher for the culturally deprived, the inference items missed by most pupils were almost equally difficult for both groups.

An analysis of the percent of error on items testing word meaning and figurative language (see Figure 3) shows that the pupils from the "culturally deprived" areas are not, in general, as frequently in error as are the pupils from more advantaged areas.

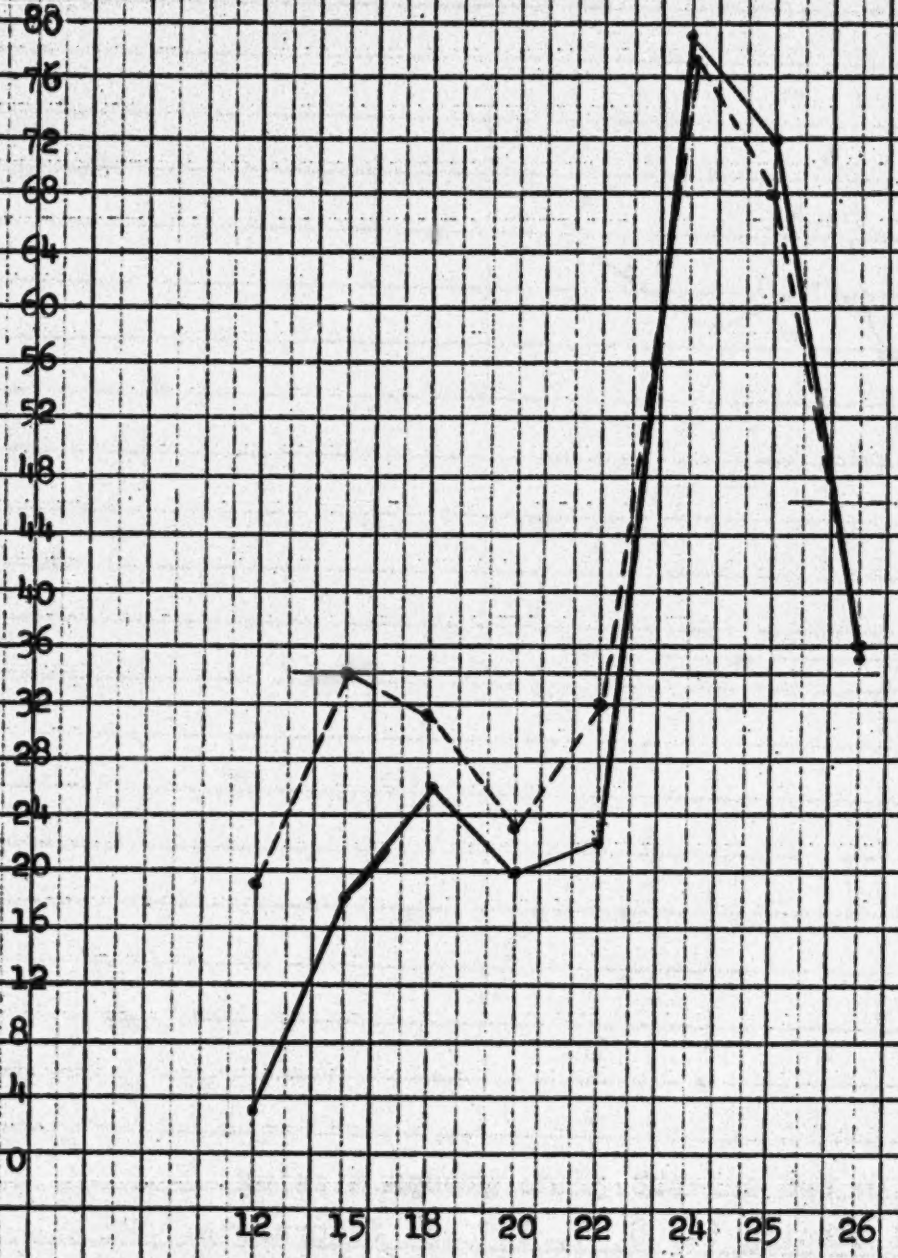

Figure 2. Percent of pupils in two seventh grade groups missing items testing ability to make inferences.

Interpretation of Scores on Written Responses. Question II A followed the reading of the poem, "Jan. Jan. The Jeweler Man." It was stated as follows:

If you picked up some of the diamonds told about in this poem, how do you think your hands would feel?

The pupils then wrote their response on spaces provided on the answer sheet. These responses were scored on a five-point scale, as follows:

Credit 5 points--A correct response with a complete expression of an idea with some touch of originality: "My hands would press against the hard diamonds and with my warmth I would melt it into a glass liquid pool." "I think my hands would feel very wet and my hands would look sparkling."

Credit 4 points--An accurate response with some elaboration of the basic idea: "I think they would feel wet and very cold." "I think they would feel very cold because they are talking about snow and ice crystals."

Credit 3 points--The pupil wrongly considers the "jewels" to be real ones but his statement shows some verve and originality: "They would have shock running all through there." I would be so surprised." "I think my hands would feel like silk with little golden stones."

Credit 2 points--Correct in grasp of the meaning, but a trite or perfunctory comment: "They would feel very cold." "My hands would feel cold."

Credit 1 point--Incorrect in interpretation, meager in content. "My hands would feel shaky." "I think they would feel rich and important."

Credit 0 points--Item omitted.

The percent of pupils in both groups receiving scores of 0 to 5 is given in figure 4. Exactly the same percent of the total pupil group, both in the culturally advantaged and the culturally deprived, omitted the response. There was a strong tendency for both groups to score around 2 and 3, but the culturally deprived did slightly better in getting the highest score of 5.

In the same manner pupils responded to a written question on the prose selection. Question II B asked: "What are wise people like? What kinds of things do they do? Write here what you think about wise people."

Answers were scored in similar fashion. Typical scores are as follows:

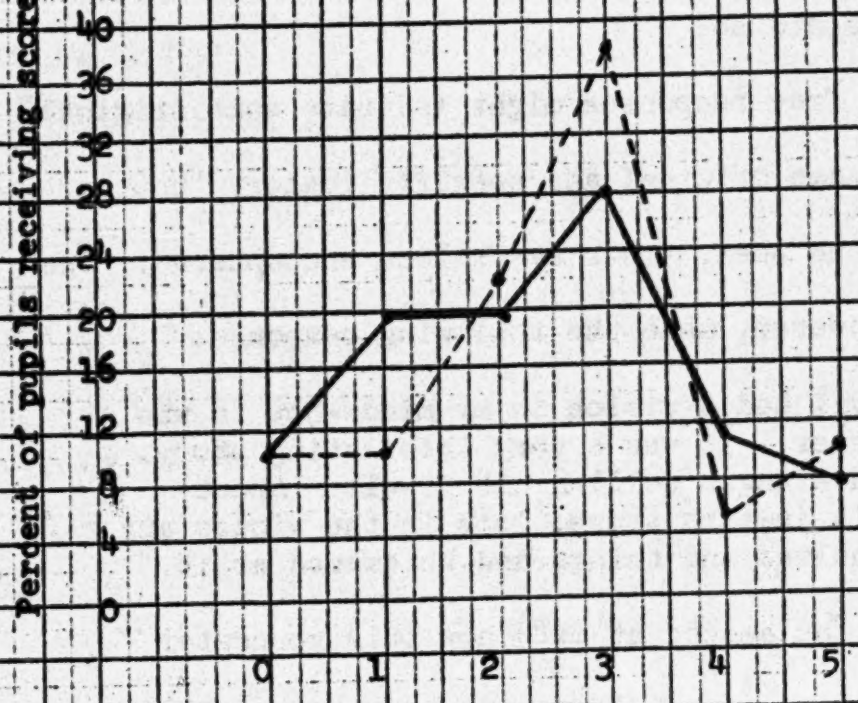

Figure 4. Percent of pupils receiving scores of 0 to 5 on essay question II A.

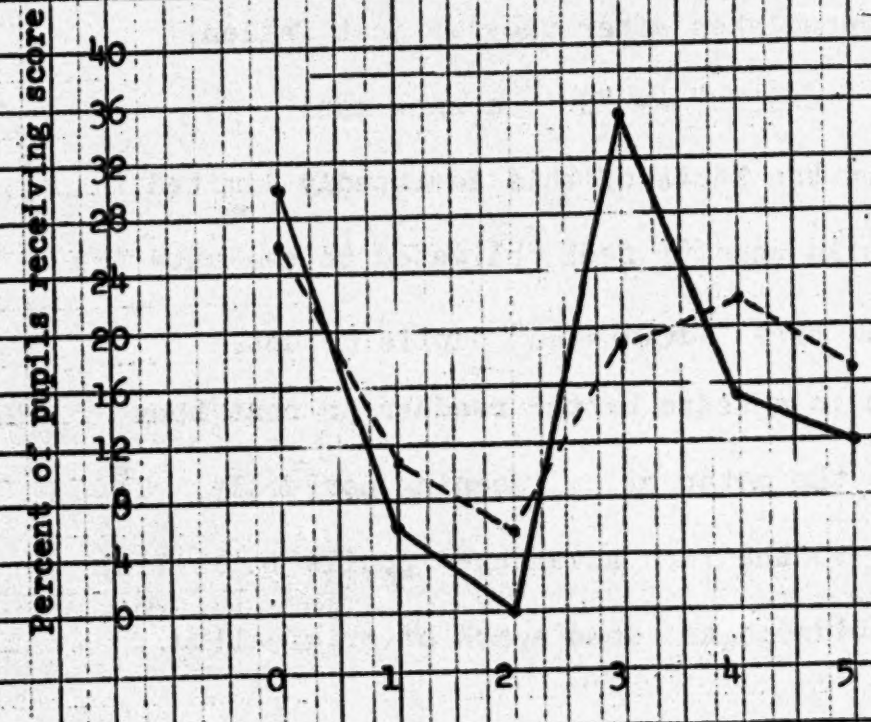

Figure 5. Percent of pupils receiving scores of 0 to 5 on essay question II B.

One of the first items noticed in listening to pupils' reaction to "The Greedy Rich Man" was that four pupils from the "advantaged" group saw the story as impossible, or "silly." This reaction was observed in only two cases in the twelve pupils from the "deprived" group. One boy from the "advantaged" group said:

> Kinda stupid the way he put on all those garments and climbed a tree, 'cause everybody knows you can't pitchfork the sun. He should have known better.

A somewhat similar response was made by a boy from the "deprived" group:

> Well, I figure it's impossible for somebody to spear the sun. And somebody with 77 garments on and a wool hat and a great coat - I think they'd die out there in the hot sun. An' the wise man -- he was kind of foolish to tell somebody to go out there in a tree and spear the sun like a golden pancake.

Another task was to attempt to discover whether or not any pupils in either group perceived any implications of the basic theme of the story--the idea that excessive greed, especially when it penalizes other persons, is both uncomfortable and unwise. Three of the nine pupils in the "advantaged" group did so, and so did five of the twelve respondents in the "disadvantaged" group. One from the group of "advantaged" pupils put it briefly:

> He should learn a lesson. Should get out and help the people. I think he learned a lesson.

A pupil in the "deprived" group said:

> It said he gave the wise man a whole lot of money just for one simple question he had asked him. A hundred rubles he gave him. He should have been satisfied with just the way the days were an' just let it go as it was.

The record of the pupils' responses shows that the "deprived" group tended to respond more freely to the interviewer's question, "What were you thinking about as you read?" The reason for the greater fluency of these boys and girls can only be a matter for speculation. Perhaps the

Implications

The study is subject to several limitations. In the first place, the number of students (59 and 73) may be too small to permit applications to other populations. In the second place, and more importantly, no direct evidence as to the actual presence--or absence--of cultural deprivation was available. The assumption that the enrollment of a pupil in a school in a "culturally advantaged" community is therefore "advantaged" is open to some question. Families are constantly on the move from one area to another, and within any given area great differences in family income, home conditions and general background are bound to exist.

However, the report here given may have the following justifiable implications for teaching pupils to read better:

1. It would appear that "advantaged" and "disadvantaged" pupils are alike in their need for guidance in perceiving inferences concerning theme, and the author's mood, tone, and purpose for writing.

2. It would appear also that if pupils in both groups are to develop abilities in reading which enable them to go beyond what is actually stated in a selection to make applications to other related situations, specific help will need to be given to them.

3. It would appear that "disadvantaged" pupils, rather than being limited in both ability to talk freely and willingness to do so, are able to express ideas vividly and in detail when they are assured of a listening-speaking situation that holds no threats to them.

4. The tape recorder may be an effective tool in helping the teacher better to understand both how a pupil responds to what he reads, and how he has arrived at an erroneous interpretation.

5. It may be justifiable to make the tentative conclusion that the reading of the "disadvantaged" and the "advantaged" pupil differs not so much in kind as in degree. If growth in specific areas of reading ability is desired it can be achieved by both groups of pupils, but such growth is likely to occur only if specific planning is done for it, and appropriate activities are provided.